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"PHYSICIAN, HEAL THYSELF."

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“PHYSICIAN, HEAL THYSELF.”

PHILADELPHIA, June 25, 1895.

To the Editor of the American Gynæcological and Obstetrical Journal :

I confess that I am not so familiar as I should be with the Bible. It may be that my text is matter of “unconscious absorption.” I put my brain, my conscience, my heart, the skill of my fingers, my time, and my purse in my calling.

The letter of Dr. Richard C. Norris, physician-in-charge of the Preston Retreat—“To the Editors of the American Gynæcological and Obstetrical Journal”—has just been called to my attention, and commands from me, in duty to the records of the institution I had the honor to serve, and in duty to myself, an answer. I answer without any appeal to that common honor or common honesty which characterizes the profession. I answer for the Retreat and for myself.

I will begin by quoting his introductory sentences: “I inclose a letter which I will ask you to publish in the next issue of your JOURNAL. The statements therein made are *absolutely correct* (Italics mine) and are *capable of ready demonstration*. I send the letter to you for publication, prompted by a desire for *accurate statement of statistics*. Dr. Price has *at all times* treated me with courtesy, and I am therefore not *actuated by any other motive*.”

I am grateful to Dr. Norris for his acknowledgment of *courtesy*. In that connection I can only express the hope that to all the representatives of my profession, when they meet me on common grounds, I extend to them the easiest thing in our professional living—*courtesy*. In this, under the stress of conditions, I may not always have succeeded. I hope that at no time I have ever played the *hypocrite*, the *sycophant*, or *coward*. I never have been or will be any man’s enemy until he willfully and deliberately plants himself in my way and makes himself mine. I have the comforting faith that there are many noble fellows of my profession who, in common with Dr. Norris, and with less of *questionable sincerity*, will acknowledge “*courtesies*” freely, willingly, and gladly extended. They make up the happiness as well as the mutual helpfulness of the profession. As to the motives which



have prompted Dr. Norris' communication, the cool, impartial, and unprejudiced temper of the profession is better able to judge than I am. In our modern days, it is known that there is such a thing as *bidding* for *cheap* notoriety. As to the desire of "accurate statement of statistics," I can respond in all sincerity to the sentiment "to be just to other and similar institutions." It will be recalled by every member of the profession who has heard a word from my lips or read a line from my pen, that I have expressed special pride as an American in our American maternities, and at the same time expressed admiration for the worthy features of others across the waters. The only worthy ambition or pride I could have was to make our own maternities, so sacred their mission, the best within the power of the genius of man to make them. I am glad to say here that I do not know a member of the profession, and hope I will never have the misfortune of knowing one—or rather another one—who has such a very happy way of expressing his appreciation of courtesies. The profession, being made up of those sharing a common humanity, has its failings, but is not altogether impoverished in the common decencies. Now, then, for the record of the Retreat as Dr. Richard C. Norris, now physician-in-charge, gives it: "The mortality record of the Preston Retreat during Dr. Price's residency there is as follows: There were ten hundred and ninety confinements and two deaths in the institution, with two more deaths outside of it that should unquestionably be credited to it. One of these was in the case of a woman sent on the sixteenth day from the Preston Retreat to the Pennsylvania Hospital, where she died three weeks later, and it was found at the post-mortem examination that she had appendicitis and purulent peritonitis."

In regard to the appendicitis case: Women commonly leave the Retreat with their husbands on the thirteenth or fourteenth day when convalescence has been thorough, favorable, and aseptic. Such was the condition of the woman referred to above. Appendicitis is commonly an acute and virulent disease, and in this case, from the purest feeling of humanity, I regret that the woman did not send for me or return to me to be cared for in my private hospital.

In saying this it is foreign to my intent and purpose to raise even the shadow of a doubt as to the good faith and wisdom of the treatment of this patient in the Pennsylvania Hospital. My regret is a natural one regarded from a professional and surgical standpoint, and will be so regarded by the unprejudiced of the profession. I would not have about my statement the coloring of reflection upon any one; it should

be kept in mind, however, that this woman died thirty-seven days after her delivery, and with her death her delivery had nothing to do; and, further, she was twenty-one days in the Pennsylvania Hospital without a diagnosis, post mortem revealing appendicitis—not a post-puerperal disturbance. As to having sent patients to the Pennsylvania Hospital, the statement is altogether and absolutely false, and no minute of such an act appears upon the records of the Preston Retreat. If such existed, it would have been known to the committees which, monthly, carefully and scrupulously examine the records.

In regard to the use of the curette, my statements were correct when I made them, and are as correct now as then.

The statistics in the seven years and a half of my professional connection with the Retreat remain as I have given them. With Dr. Goodell's consent, I always included his statistics with my own. They were the statistics of the institution and not of an individual, nor were they ever so claimed. They covered a period of more than ten years. During my period of more than seven years as resident physician there were two deaths, neither of which could in common honesty or by any form of logic be credited to the mortality of the institution. The first case was one of eclampsia, admitted in labor and in convulsions, and died on the fourth day without secreting a drachm of urine. The second death was one in a case of acute mania with a vicious history. Had either of these patients died in an ambulance on their way to the institution, her death could have as honorably and honestly been credited to the Retreat.

Again quoting: "The second death outside the hospital followed a Cæsarean section. The woman had been delivered once by Dr. Price and a number of times during Dr. Goodell's incumbency by the induction of labor, high forceps, and version." This statement, after the "labor of the mountain," is correct. It will be noted that Dr. Norris has been having his field days outside of the Retreat or his trust. What mother was neglected? The will of Dr. Jonas Preston, through whose beneficence the Retreat was founded, limits the field of the charity to Philadelphia and Delaware Counties. Mrs. Elizabeth Hartley, the deformed Englishwoman, was a resident of Altoona. After many unfortunate deliveries, she was counseled by me to have a Cæsarean or Porro operation that she might have a living child. For the delivery referred to she made no application to the Retreat; her name does not appear on the books or minutes. By correspondence she made all her arrangements for the Cæsarean section, and traveled from Altoona in a common railroad coach at midnight. All

arrangements had been made to receive her at a private hospital. She simply went to the Retreat on her arrival in the city, because she knew the nurse there and had no other acquaintance to whom she could go. On her previous admissions to the Retreat she had deceived both Dr. Goodell and myself as to her place of residence. It would have been very agreeable to me could she have been admitted to the Retreat, as the entire care of her was at my expense. The cold night ride resulted in acute double pneumonia, of which she died speedily. The resident physician of the Retreat receives applications and recommends admissions. The regular monthly committees of four visit the institution weekly, examine papers of all applicants, and inspect wards. Any accusation of irregularities is a reflection upon the managers, their intelligence and honesty in the discharge of the duties of their trust. With the record of six Porros without a death, I am satisfied that if the above case had been a resident, and could have been admitted to the Retreat two weeks before period of delivery, she could have been saved. In this connection I might refer to numerous distressing cases—one a Porro at midnight—referred to me while resident at this splendid charity; many of them gave intense anxiety for the mother and for the record of a charity the good name of which had reached beyond the bounds of our own continent. One distressing case I now recall was sent from the Pennsylvania Hospital. The woman was pregnant and at term. She was suffering with a tubercular ankle joint; a partial resection had been done at the hospital, and drains placed. She was in a feeble and exhausted condition when sent to the Retreat for delivery. She was safely delivered, and returned to her family fully convalescent. It is not as much what is in the communication of Dr. Norris as what can be read between the lines: not so much the tortured statements as the animus. He parades his conscientiousness as to the integrity of the statistics of the Retreat; he seeks the statements of some itinerant gossip, that most despicable species of the human family, to impeach them. His time could have been more profitably employed in looking after the great trust his association with the institution imposes. Instead of traducing his predecessors, soiling the name and fame of the institution with which he is officially associated, and by innuendo insulting the managers, he could have employed his time in reducing his own mortality. We appreciate the fact that his mortality in his short incumbency must be very mortifying to him; but he does not improve the matter by rushing into one of our leading medical journals and assailing the splendid record of the Retreat. His time, nerve, and

brains could better have been devoted to the study of obstetrics, a subject with which he does not seem to be as familiar as one should be filling so high a trust. Where the mortality of any maternity (Retreat included) exceeds two per cent., it would be well for the managers, for the sake of their own good names and in all charity, and for the sake of poor mothers, to close the doors of the maternity or have its walls leveled to the ground.

I have no objection to Dr. Norris keeping his own statistics inside and out. As they now seem, certainly no one would be desirous of the job. But I object to any attempt on his part to keep or correct mine. The hand that touches me I would have surgically clean. Before my election to the Retreat I was informed that Dr. Goodell was opposed to my succeeding him. I called upon him to ascertain the grounds of his opposition. (At no time could our personal relations have been regarded as angelic.) In my interview with him he frankly stated that his records of the work of the institution would be left behind him, and that he did not desire to have an enemy succeed him. To this I replied that the records were the property of the Retreat; that they belonged to the trust, and as such were sacred to the institution. Dr. Goodell was never given reason to complain of betrayal. I was succeeding a professor in one of our leading colleges, and I recall then as now the very terse utterance of an eminent teacher: "A dishonest man is dangerous enough in his ignorance, but he is tenfold more so when armed with the polished weapons of a higher education." I would like to have Dr. Richard C. Norris' statistics in the form in which he keeps them, the deaths in the Retreat, and those immediately following discharge, whether due to appendicitis, Cæsarean section, or imperfect convalescence.

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